DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 052 UD 032 296

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|---|---|
| TITLE | Where Are the Adults? The Attitudes of Parents, Teachers, Clergy, Coaches, and Youth Workers on Teen Pregnancy. A Focus Group Report. |
| INSTITUTION | National Campaign To Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Washington, DC. |
| SPONS AGENCY | William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Palo Alto, CA.; Carnegie Corp. of New York, NY.; David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Los Altos, CA.; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, NJ. |
| PUB DATE | 1998-04-00 |
| NOTE | 68p.; Funding also received from the Summit Foundation. |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160) |
| EDRS PRICE | EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Adolescents; Adults; Athletic Coaches; *Attitudes; Blacks; Clergy; *Early Parenthood; Focus Groups; Hispanic Americans; Parents; *Pregnancy; *Prevention; Questionnaires; *Sex Education; Social Problems; Social Workers; Teachers; *Urban Youth; Youth Problems; Youth Programs |

ABSTRACT

In 1997, the National Campaign To Prevent Teen Pregnancy convened nine focus groups of parents of teens and other adults who work with teens such as teachers, clergy, coaches, youth recreation specialists, youth-serving organization staff, and community outreach workers. This report publishes the results of these focus groups, which involved 57 parents and 26 other adults involved with teens in Baltimore (Maryland), Phoenix (Arizona), and Indianapolis (Indiana). In Phoenix, participants were primarily Hispanic, while in Baltimore, participants were primarily African-American. The Indianapolis groups were racially and ethnically mixed. Focus group participants agreed that teen pregnancy was just one of the many serious problems facing American teenagers, and that it is a problem that can be reduced but not completely prevented. Participants believed that teen pregnancy is inextricably intertwined with other issues teens face. They considered it a problem for teen parents, their families, and society alike. Although they thought that teens and their parents have the primary responsibility to prevent teen pregnancy, participants thought that schools, religious institutions, and community organizations have important roles to play in supporting parents. Participants also believed that barriers to teen pregnancy are as complex and intertwined as the causes. They believed that reducing teen pregnancy would require better communication between teens and adults, teens being taught how hard it is to raise a child, teens having meaningful activities to occupy their nonschool time, and the media stopping its bombardment of teens with messages that glorify sex and portray teen pregnancy unrealistically. Some messages in support of these goals are suggested. Appendixes include focus group specifications, the screening questionnaire, and the focus group discussion outline. (SLD)

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The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

# Where Are the Adults?

## *The Attitudes of Parents, Teachers, Clergy, Coaches, and Youth Workers on Teen Pregnancy*

A Focus Group Report

Released by
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
April 1999

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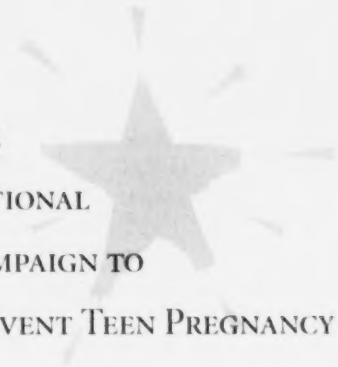

THE
NATIONAL
CAMPAIGN TO
PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

# Where Are the Adults?

## *The Attitudes of Parents, Teachers, Clergy, Coaches, and Youth Workers on Teen Pregnancy*

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A FOCUS GROUP REPORT

RELEASED BY
THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

APRIL 1998

## Acknowledgments

The National Campaign gratefully acknowledges the support of its many funders. Special thanks go to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Summit Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for generously supporting all of the Campaign's activities.

Design: Matthew Langley, Mediastudio, Arlington, Virginia

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Suggested citation:
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (1998). *Where Are the Adults? A Focus Group Report*. Washington, DC: Author.

## Foreword

Knowing your audience is one key to conducting a successful public awareness or media campaign, and one of the best ways to learn what an audience thinks is to conduct focus groups—professionally moderated discussions with eight to twelve members of the target audience. Commercial marketers and political candidates have long made use of focus groups to test new products, ideas, and ad campaigns. In recent years, developers of public service media campaigns have also begun using this research technique to refine and sharpen their own ideas and messages.

Last year, the National Campaign convened nine focus groups of parents of teens and other adults who work with teens as teachers, clergy, coaches, youth recreation specialists, youth-serving organization staff, and community outreach workers. The sessions took place in three U.S. cities: Baltimore, Phoenix, and Indianapolis. We conducted these focus groups because we believe strongly that some of the best solutions to preventing teen pregnancy involve parents and other adults, who, after all, shape the environment in which teenagers live. Our goal for the focus groups was two-fold: (1) to learn what a cross-section of parents and other adults thought about teen pregnancy and ways to prevent it, and (2) to help the Campaign craft prevention messages that would resonate with parents and other teen-involved adults and motivate them to take action in their families and communities to help prevent teen pregnancy.

Focus group reports are usually treated as proprietary information and rarely shared. However, we found that what the parents and other adults had to say in these focus groups was so compelling that we are taking the unusual step of publishing the results. We hope that by doing so we can offer practitioners in the field new insights, as well as encourage the dozens of teen pregnancy prevention media campaigns in states and communities all over the country to share their audience research as well, whether surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one interviews. That way we can all be sure that everyone's efforts are based on the best information available.

The National Campaign would like to express its appreciation to a number of people who made this project possible: Nancy Leopold, an independent marketing consultant, directed the research project with assistance from Dr. Ed Maibach, Director of Research at Porter/Novelli, a public relations and marketing firm in Washington, DC. Communications Sciences Group (CSG), San Francisco, designed and conducted the focus groups, analyzed the data, and drafted this report. Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide, New York, developed numerous message concepts about teen pregnancy prevention, eleven of which were presented to the focus groups participants for discussion.

The National Campaign plans to conduct additional focus groups with adults—and teens—in the coming years, and we look forward to sharing those results as well. In the meantime, we eagerly anticipate learning from the innovative public awareness work going on in states and communities across the country. Together, I believe, we can make a difference in encouraging teens to avoid too-early pregnancy and parenthood and in supporting parents and other adults in their efforts to help the teens in their lives.

Sarah Brown
*Director*
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

## Table of Contents


**Foreword** ..... iii
**Summary** ..... 1
- Purpose of the Focus Group Research ..... 1
- Methodology ..... 1
- Key Findings ..... 2
  - The problem of teen pregnancy ..... 2
  - Can the teen pregnancy problem be solved? ..... 2
  - Links between teen pregnancy and other problems teens face ..... 2
  - Whose problem is teen pregnancy? Who is responsible for preventing it? ..... 3
  - Barriers to teen pregnancy prevention ..... 3
- How to Prevent Teen Pregnancy ..... 5
- Reactions To Message Concepts ..... 5

**Background and Objectives** ..... 7
**Methodology** ..... 8
**Summary of Findings** ..... 11
- The Problems Facing American Teenagers ..... 11
  - Violence, Safety, and Drugs ..... 13
  - Peer Pressure ..... 13
  - Immaturity ..... 14
  - Lack of a Value System ..... 14
  - Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy ..... 15
- Perceptions of Teen Pregnancy as a Problem ..... 16
  - The Inevitability of Teen Pregnancy ..... 16
  - Consequences ..... 18
- Barriers to Teen Pregnancy Prevention ..... 19
  - Teen Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs, and Skill Deficiencies ..... 19
  - Parents' Skill Deficiencies ..... 20
  - Lack of Parental Attention ..... 21

Lack of Supervision and Appropriate Activities ..... 22
Media Influence ..... 22
Lack of Consistent Messages ..... 23
Prevention Strategies ..... 24
Responsibility for Prevention ..... 25
Support for Teen Pregnancy Prevention ..... 27
For Parents ..... 27
For Teens ..... 27
Community Support ..... 28
**Results From Presentation of Message Executions and Motivational Concepts** ..... 29
Credibility ..... 29
Motivational Appeal ..... 29
Emotional Effect ..... 30
Message Executions ..... 31
Motivational Concepts ..... 43
**Appendices** ..... 45
Appendix 1: Focus Group Specifications ..... 45
Appendix 2: Focus Group Screening Questionnaire ..... 47
Appendix 3: Focus Group Discussion Outline ..... 54

## Summary

### Purpose of the Focus Group Research

During March and April 1997, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy commissioned focus group research among parents of teens and other adults who work with teens as teachers, clergy, coaches, youth recreation specialists, youth-serving organization staff, and community outreach workers. The nine focus groups elicited participants' perceptions and beliefs about the "problem" of teen pregnancy through moderated discussion and their reactions to creative message concepts about preventing teen pregnancy.

The National Campaign commissioned the focus group research for two primary reasons: (1) to learn what a cross-section of parents and other adults thought about teen pregnancy and ways to prevent it, and (2) to help the Campaign craft prevention messages that would resonate with parents and other teen-involved adults and motivate them to take action in their families and communities to help prevent teen pregnancy.

### Methodology

Focus group interviews were conducted with 57 parents of teenagers aged 12-17 and 26 other adults involved with teens. Nine groups were held, three each in cities chosen for their relatively high teen pregnancy rates and their demographic differences: Baltimore, Maryland; Phoenix, Arizona; and Indianapolis, Indiana. In each city, two of the groups included both parents and teen-involved adults, while the third group consisted of parents only. Each group included men and women holding a variety of political beliefs. In Phoenix, focus group participants were predominantly Hispanic parents or adults working with Hispanic teenagers. In Baltimore, the groups consisted of predominantly African-American parents or adults working with African-American teenagers. The Indianapolis groups were racially and ethnically mixed.

Focus group research is very useful for determining what respondents' underlying beliefs and perceptions are, why they think and feel as they do about a particular issue, idea, behavior, or product, and how they form their attitudes. However, since focus group research is a qualitative methodology, readers are cautioned not to develop population-based generalizations. Because the number of respondents was small, and because the groups were not recruited to be representative of the entire U.S. population, this report should be regarded as directional rather than definitive in nature.

## Key Findings

*The problem of teen pregnancy*

According to the focus group participants, teen pregnancy is just one of many serious problems facing American teenagers. They consider drug use, violence, and pressure from peers to engage in unacceptable behaviors as more serious and compelling, mostly because many of the consequences of these problems are potentially more harmful than those associated with pregnancy.

*Can the teen pregnancy problem be solved?*

Participants believe that teen pregnancy can be reduced but not completely prevented. They agree that even the most effective prevention efforts will not reduce teen pregnancy by 100 percent because "even good kids make bad mistakes." Many participants view teen pregnancy as a self-perpetuating problem, one often associated with poverty, less education, and to a larger extent, dysfunctional family structures, regardless of income or social class. They expressed particular concern about the vicious, difficult-to-break cycle of "teens having babies who grow up to be teens who have babies."

Participants believe some teenage pregnancies are inevitable given the large number of teens who are sexually active. Most participants believe that while most adults may not wish their teens to have sex, this is an unrealistic expectation. Generally, there is more acceptance among participants of sexual activity among older adolescents (those aged 17-19) than among younger ones (those aged 16 or younger). Some respondents feel that regardless of prevention efforts, there are still some "teenage girls who want to have babies because they want someone to love, someone to take care of." Most respondents agree that it is entirely acceptable for a teenager who is 18 or 19 to be married and have children; therefore, pregnancy prevention efforts should be focused on younger adolescents.

*Links between teen pregnancy and other problems teens face*

Participants believe teen pregnancy is inextricably intertwined with other issues teens face, such as drug use, violence, sexually transmitted diseases, and early onset of sexual experimentation. Respondents are knowledgeable about these problems and perceive a complex relationship among them. Peer pressure, poor decision-making skills, lack of strong values, absence of a sense of personal responsibility, lack of future

aspirations and goals, and youthful immaturity, vulnerability, rebellion, and impulsiveness were identified as major causes of teen problems. Participants believe these causal factors are exacerbated by broader social and environmental influences, especially the pervasive, negative influence of the media and the absence and irresponsibility of some parents.

***Whose problem is teen pregnancy? Who is responsible for preventing it?***

Participants believe teen pregnancy is a problem for teen parents, their families, and society alike because all suffer the consequences. Respondents are most concerned about the consequences for the teens themselves—the physical, emotional, and financial consequences of early parenting, including the loss of childhood, interruption (or abandonment) of educational plans, and adverse career or income consequences. Participants also believe that teens' parents and family members are heavily affected by teen pregnancies. Societal consequences identified by participants include the added burden on taxpayers, increased abortion rates, increased domestic violence, and continuing poverty. Interestingly, focus group participants did not mention the consequences for the children of teen mothers as a specific issue, although it may have been assumed, or included under such general concerns as "poverty."

Teens and their parents have the primary responsibility to prevent teen pregnancy, according to participants, but schools, religious institutions, and community organizations have important roles in supporting parents in their efforts and filling in when parents fail to teach appropriate values and pay adequate attention to their children. While they disagree about the appropriate roles for government agencies in preventing teen pregnancy, participants are virtually unanimous in their condemnation of the media, which they believe strongly influences teens. Participants feel that those responsible for program and commercial content have a responsibility to "clean up their acts" because TV shows, music, and other forms of popular entertainment offer unrealistic portrayals of relationships and of sex and its consequences. Some respondents think teens themselves (especially in peer educator roles) and teen role models should be involved in teen pregnancy prevention.

***Barriers to teen pregnancy prevention***

Participants believe the barriers to teen pregnancy prevention are as complex and intertwined as the causes. Perceived barriers to pregnancy prevention include:

- **Lack of strong values among teens and their parents.** Teenagers' lack of values concerns focus group participants most. Participants believe that teenagers have too little exposure to appropriate values that can guide them in responsible decision-making and too much exposure to inappropriate values. Respondents feel that most parents are failing to teach their kids how to treat other people and are setting bad examples by engaging in promiscuous and risky behaviors themselves. The media and peers are also cited as sources of poor values.

- **Teens' knowledge and skill deficiencies.** Participants believe that some teens lack goals and aspirations, decision-making skills, and a sense of personal accountability and responsibility, all of which are barriers to preventing pregnancy. Participants also believe many teens lack communication skills required to prevent pregnancy successfully. They are uncomfortable talking with their parents about sex and pregnancy, and cannot successfully negotiate what they want in dating relationships.

- **Teens lack an understanding of the real life complexities of conception and pregnancy,** although few participants feel that teenagers lack accurate information about the mechanics of sex or contraception. What they don't understand are the serious consequences of too-early pregnancy. Simply providing information and education about sex does not necessarily lead to pregnancy avoidance.

- **Parental lack of skills** is a bigger barrier than are the deficiencies of teens, according to focus group participants. Parents need to build skills, most notably communication skills, in order to help their children avoid pregnancy. Parents need assistance in finding information, gaining access to resources, overcoming fear, and learning how to talk with their children about sex, love, and what the difference is.

- **Social acceptability of teen pregnancy.** Some participants fear that teens share the belief of some adults that it is all right to be a pregnant teenager and to form families in adolescence, even if unmarried.

- **Low self-esteem among teens.** Participants in every group raised the issue of self-esteem. Participants believe low self-esteem leads to inappropriately early sexual activity with pregnancy as a likely outcome. Many believe that low self-esteem and lack of self-worth and self-confidence lead teenagers, especially girls, to engage in behaviors that they otherwise would not engage in. Much of the blame was placed on the households from which these teens come, households viewed as lacking in caring, nurturing, and emotional support. Teenagers from such environments search for love elsewhere, from a boyfriend or girlfriend, or from the unconditional love a baby offers.

- **Teenagers' immaturity, irresponsibility, and impulsiveness.** Many participants believe teen pregnancy and other serious problems of adolescents are consequences of immaturity. They worry about teenagers not understanding the consequences of their actions, about their tendency to make decisions impulsively, and about their inclination to rebel against rules and order.

- **Lack of parental attention, adult supervision, and appropriate activities.** Many participants expressed the sentiment that "there are so many parents out there that couldn't care less what their kids do." Participants put the blame on the

need for parents to work, the prevalence of single-parent households, lack of good parenting skills, and selfish parents who are too focused on their own lives and problems to participate actively in the lives of their children. Others point to immature parents who are unable to offer effective emotional support to their own children. Most participants believe that teens have too much time to themselves, which can lead to sexual experimentation and other problems. In Baltimore, participants were especially concerned about the lack of resources (due to government budget cutting) for community youth programs, such as recreation centers, after-school programs, and school-sponsored extracurricular activities.

- **Negative influence of "the media."** In every group, participants placed much of the blame for teen sexual promiscuity and pregnancies on television shows, movies, and popular music that glorify sex and do not depict the real consequences of teen pregnancy.

- **Inconsistent messages about teen pregnancy.** Many participants believe teens are receiving conflicting messages about pregnancy from parents, other adults, and society in general. Some are concerned about a mixed message that encourages both abstinence and responsible contraception use. While few participants feel that pregnant and parenting teens should be shunned, many are concerned that social and economic support may suggest to teens that "teen pregnancy is o.k."

## How to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Regardless of their views on teen sex, contraception, and abortion (and there is disagreement), participants agree on the critical roles parents, the media, and, to a lesser extent, schools and other societal institutions could and should play in reducing teen pregnancy.

Participants believe that reducing teen pregnancy will require:

- parents talking and listening to their kids about sex, values, and relationships from the time they are young well into adolescence,
- parents and other adults caring about teens so they have the self-esteem, goals for their futures, and skills required to resist peer pressure,
- teens being taught how hard it is to raise a child,
- teens having meaningful activities to occupy their non-school time, and
- the media stopping its bombardment of teens with messages that glorify sex and portray teen pregnancy unrealistically.

## Reactions to Message Concepts

The focus group participants were given the opportunity to react to several message concepts about teen pregnancy prevention (see pp. 31-44). They liked those

message concepts that recognize the complexity of the problem, offer (either implicitly or explicitly) an action they could take at home or in their communities, or support their efforts by telling them parents can make a difference in teens' attitudes and behavior. They rejected messages perceived to be too simplistic in characterizing the problem and its solutions, or disrespectful of teens or adults. Participants identified several messages as the most believable and persuasive:

- "You need to finish being a kid before you become a parent."
- "Adolescence is for education and skill-building."
- "Babies need and deserve committed parents."
- "We need to change the boys' behavior as well as the girls'."
- "Find time to talk/Get comfortable talking to your teens about sex, love, and values."
- "Teens need you now more than ever."
- "If you don't teach your kids values, [the media] will."
- "The time to prevent teen pregnancy is long before they're teens."

## Background and Objectives

In April 1997, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy commissioned focus group research among parents of teens and other adults who work with teens as teachers, clergy, coaches, youth recreation specialists, youth-serving organization staff, and community outreach workers. The nine focus groups elicited participants' perceptions and beliefs about the "problem" of teen pregnancy through moderated discussion and their reactions to creative message concepts about preventing teen pregnancy.

The National Campaign commissioned the focus group research for two primary reasons: (1) to learn what a cross-section of parents and other adults thought about teen pregnancy and ways to prevent it, and (2) to help the Campaign craft prevention messages that would resonate with parents and other teen-involved adults and motivate them to take action in their families and communities to help prevent teen pregnancy.

The first section of this report provides background information on the project, including the research objectives. The second section discusses the research methodology. The third section summarizes major findings from the research in key topical areas, including a detailed examination of respondent reactions to 11 messages and three overarching motivational concept statements.

The focus group research project had four specific objectives:

- To explore general perceptions among parents and other adults involved with teens about whether teen pregnancy is perceived as a serious problem, what its primary causes are, what barriers impede prevention efforts, which prevention solutions should be favored, and who bears primary responsibility for teen pregnancy prevention;

- To determine how the focus group participants comprehended various message concepts—whether they were credible, what concerns they evoked, and what the most persuasive or motivational elements within them were;

- To explore reactions to alternative phrasings of message concepts to elicit beliefs and emotions about teen pregnancy; and

- To determine the extent to which the abstinence/contraception controversy affects adults' thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, or emotions.

Respondent recruitment specifications, the screening questionnaires, the focus group interview discussion outline, and information about the composition of the nine focus group interviews, are appended to this report.

## Methodology

Focus group interviews are a qualitative data collection method used widely in marketing, public opinion, and behavioral research. Respondents are recruited systematically by telephone or face-to-face contact to come to a central location for a group interview of approximately two hours duration. A professional moderator leads the discussion using an interview protocol that stipulates the topics to be discussed as well as specific question wording and probing strategies.

The small size of focus groups (usually 8-15 people) allows for considerable interaction among participants, permitting in-depth exploration of themes and ideas developed in the course of the discussion. Group interaction offers advantages over the one-on-one interviews of survey research, including:

- Participants are stimulated by other group members to refine and expand upon their ideas and opinions. They are free to comment and respond to questions in whatever way they like. Unlike respondents in survey research, they are not required to choose from an interviewer-selected list of alternatives.

- A comment by one member may trigger a new idea in another member of the group. When this happens, the idea may spread throughout the group, changing as it passes from one member to another, giving researchers insights that would not be obtainable otherwise.

- Individuals are under no pressure to make up answers in order to satisfy the demands of the interviewer because questions are addressed to the group.

In the portion of each focus group that explored respondents' reactions to creative message executions and motivational concepts, Communication Sciences Group (CSG) concentrated on these variables: comprehension, credibility, motivation, and emotional effect. In the first two focus groups, 20 messages were tested in four categories of five each. Respondents were asked to identify which one of the five in each category would be most likely to motivate them to do something. Following these two groups, the client and other observers decided to reduce the number of messages to 11 to better facilitate discussion in the seven subsequent group interviews.

Focus group research is particularly useful for determining how attitudes are formed, what underlying beliefs and perceptions an audience has, and why respondents think and feel as they do about a particular issue, idea, behavior, or product. However, since focus group research is a qualitative methodology, readers are cautioned not to develop population-based generalizations. The small number of respondents and the non-probabilistic techniques used to select them mean that *this report should be regarded as directional rather than definitive in nature.*

The nine focus group interviews in this project involved 57 parents of teenagers aged 12-17 and 26 teen-involved adults (see Appendix 1). Teen-involved adults were defined as "influencers" of teenagers because of their profession or vocation, such as teachers, coaches, clergy, youth recreation specialists, youth-serving organization staff, and community outreach workers. It should be noted that some of the teen-involved adults were also parents themselves; however, they were recruited as influencers. The groups were held April 1-2, 1997, in Baltimore, Maryland; April 3-4 in Phoenix, Arizona; and April 7-8 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Three focus groups were convened in each location.

Several criteria were used in determining the proposed sites: city population and level of urbanization; teen pregnancy rates; demographic characteristics, including race/ethnicity and median incomes; and the suitability of available focus group facilities. For example, Arizona ranks second in the country in terms of teen birth rates among females aged 15-19. Baltimore and Indianapolis also have high percentages of births to mothers under age 20 compared with all births in the cities—22 percent and 15 percent, respectively.

Screening questionnaires (see Appendix 2) were developed based upon specifications from the National Campaign. Respondents were recruited by CSG's allied company, the Survey Methods Group, and recruitment assistance was provided in each of the three cities by local field research vendors—the Family Research Group in Baltimore, Quality Controlled Services in Phoenix, and Stone Research Services in Indianapolis. Respondents were informed during recruitment that the discussions were for research purposes and that their comments would be reported to a client. Respondents were paid an incentive of $50 for their attendance. All groups were held in professional focus group facilities.

A discussion outline (see Appendix 3) was prepared by CSG for use in the nine interviews. Assistance and guidance in its development were provided by Ed Maibach, Porter Novelli, Nancy Leopold, and staff from Ogilvy and Mather, the creative team working with the National Campaign.

Three focus group interviews were held in each of the three cities; two in each city were composed of both parents and teen-involved adults, segregated by household income; and the third group consisted of parents only. The groups were roughly balanced in terms of gender. In terms of race and ethnicity, in Phoenix, the groups consisted of predominantly Hispanic parents or adults working with Hispanic teenagers. In Baltimore, the groups consisted of predominantly African-American parents or adults working with African-American teenagers. African-Americans and Hispanics are disproportionately affected by teen pregnancy. In each city, the three groups had these general characteristics:

- Group 1: Low-income parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who held a variety of political beliefs, and teen-involved adults with a variety of political beliefs who work with low-income 12- to 17-year-olds.

- Group 2: Low- and middle-income parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who held a variety of political beliefs.

- Group 3: Middle-income parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who held a variety of political beliefs, and teen-involved adults with a variety of political beliefs who work with middle-income 12- to 17-year-olds.

Overall, among the nine groups, 47 percent of the participants were either Caucasian or were adults who interacted with Caucasian teenagers, 16 percent were Hispanic or were adults working with Hispanic teenagers, 25 percent were African-American or worked with African-American teenagers, and 12 percent either identified themselves as mixed-race or were adults who worked with multi-racial teenagers. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents identified themselves as "mostly" or "somewhat" conservative, 37 percent identified as "mostly" or "somewhat" liberal, and 24 percent said they were neither liberal nor conservative.

## Summary of Findings

These research findings, covering areas of both agreement and disagreement among focus group participants, are organized into five subsections, following the discussion outline. The first section presents information about how respondents view the pregnancy problem in relation to all of the teen-related problems that worry them. The second describes how respondents define the teen pregnancy problem. The third presents findings about how parents and teen-involved adults view the barriers to pregnancy prevention. The fourth offers respondents' views about how parents, teens, and communities can best be supported in their efforts to reduce teen pregnancy. The last section explores respondents' reactions to 11 possible message executions and three overarching motivational concepts developed by the National Campaign.

### The Problems Facing American Teenagers

Teen pregnancy is viewed by parents and youth-involved adults as a serious problem, but not the most serious one that teenagers confront. In fact, respondents had trouble choosing any one of the many compelling problems faced by young Americans as being predominant. As one respondent explained, it is "drugs, violence, sex, AIDS–all of them; it's hard to identify one." Drugs, peer pressure, and violence were mentioned most often and with the gravest concern. Respondents also frequently mentioned early sexual activity and sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

Respondents associated teen pregnancy with all of the other problems that also worried them. For instance, they related violence and drug use to peer pressure, which they linked to teens' poor decision-making skills. They associated poor decision-making, in turn, with a lack of values and an unwillingness to accept personal responsibility, two factors perceived to be related to the early onset of sexual activity and pregnancy. Participants did not feel that there was a direct line of causality between these problems; in each group, they were mentioned in different combinations and the relationships were viewed somewhat differently. But, across all the interviews, the problems seemed inextricably linked in the minds of most respondents. As a result, the research suggests that many adults view the teen pregnancy problem with a considerable degree of understanding and sophistication.

Participants expressed great concern about contemporary teen attitudes and behaviors—particularly the perceived lack of goals and aspirations, values and morals, decision-making skills, and personal accountability and responsibility. Respondents felt that teens often make choices that are irresponsible and without a moral foundation. They seemed to recognize, however, that this may simply be due to immaturity. As a participant in Baltimore explained:

> *Let's be realistic. We're talking not about teenagers, we're talking about children. We're talking about children who are governed more by their feelings, mostly, than they are by their minds.*

Teens' vulnerability due to their immaturity is compounded by negative societal and environmental factors. Respondents pointed to the social problems mentioned above—violence, drugs, and peer pressure—as well as the increasing absence of parents, all of which force teenagers to make difficult decisions under pressured circumstances. As a parent in Phoenix explained:

> *They have to make a lot more decisions on their own these days. And it's just the way society [is]—due to the fact that so many parents have to be out there working just to survive–that they're home making a lot of decisions on their own that we ever had to as teenagers.*

Respondents also worry about the influence of the media. In Phoenix, a grandmother and guardian of two teenagers said:

> *Let's face it. The society, the media, is also involved in this...Media, entertainment, news, sports, the society in general, politicians, everybody needs to get more responsible because how can we expect a teenager to be responsible for themselves when we're showing grown-ups on TV not being responsible for themselves and getting away with it?*

Respondents may not perceive teen pregnancy as the worst possible problem for two reasons: it is seen as interrelated with other worrisome issues, and it carries less serious consequences. In other words, pregnancy may be less of a concern than AIDS or violence because "it is not like you don't get a second chance." As one participant said, "[I] worry about violence a lot more than teen pregnancy." This sentiment was echoed in almost all of the groups. A father of a 17-year-old girl in Phoenix said:

> *I used to look at it like getting pregnant would be the worst thing that could happen to a little girl. Now I realize it's not. It does affect your life. It does limit your future. It does affect your plans. But there are a lot of worse things.*

Because the respondents identified teen pregnancy as linked with a larger constellation of problems for teens, the rest of this section explores their attitudes toward these related issues:

- violence, safety, and drugs
- peer pressure
- sexual activity and pregnancy
- immaturity
- lack of values

**Violence, Safety, and Drugs**

"It's a violent world out there, and I'm scared every day that my kid won't get home from school," said one respondent. Parents seemed most concerned about the randomness of violence and the lack of control they have over their children's safety. Violence is also viewed as a very real threat by teens themselves, according to the participants. In Indianapolis, one respondent said:

> *I hear [teenagers] identify [concerns about] feeling safe and secure...They're just not safe. It could be the neighborhood environment or the school environment. There's always that issue of safety: 'Am I going to be O.K. here? Do I have to look out for someone with a gun or someone with drugs or someone that would be verbally or physically abusive?' So it's always that issue I hear: safety and security.*

Parents and teen-involved adults are also very concerned about drug use among teenagers. Several respondents noted that drugs today are far more pervasive, potent, and dangerous than those that they may have experimented with as teens and young adults. Repeatedly, respondents spoke of the linkage between drug use, violence, pregnancy, and the other problems facing American teens.

**Peer Pressure**

Adults worry about teens choosing the right friends because the wrong ones can lead them into drug use, early sex, gang involvement, and violence. Said one focus group participant:

> *If you get involved with the wrong crowds, there could be a multiple amount of things. Whether it be sex, drugs, gangs, you know, just getting involved with the wrong people can be really detrimental.*

Otherwise intelligent, honest, and reliable teens will make different decisions among their peers than they would make independently. As one respondent noted, "even good kids can make bad decisions in a group."

The lines between good and bad and right and wrong are very fine, said one group of respondents. They felt that teenagers have a difficult time understanding the differences. As a participant in Indianapolis explained:

*My 17-year-old is a junior...and he really strives hard to stay on the honor roll, to do well. But inasmuch as he tries hard to do real well, he doesn't fall into the trap of gangs and the drugs, but he knows so many people...He's just surrounded by all of these...people who are into drugs and gangs, but he's not allowing himself to be a part of that. And I just keep praying daily that he does not slip and fall into that trap.*

Another respondent in the group observed that "it takes a very strong child, *a very strong* child, to not slip." "Kids aren't leaders; they're followers—they allow themselves to be manipulated," said another respondent. The respondents identified the media as the most pervasive negative influence on peer norms.

**Immaturity**

Respondents worry about teenagers not understanding the consequences of their actions, about their tendency to make decisions impulsively, and about their need to rebel against rules and order. To a great extent, however, respondents recognized these as natural elements of growing up.

Again and again, respondents expressed concern about teens' reluctance to accept responsibility and accountability—about their sexual behavior, their educations, and other aspects of their lives. Respondents believe that teens have a difficult time understanding the concept of responsibility or taking it seriously. Impulsive decisions—to have sex too early or to drop out of school—affect them for the rest of their lives. As one parent noted, many teens today believe that "tomorrow will take care of itself," and therefore don't set goals for themselves.

Some respondents said that teenagers go through stages that place them at-risk. "Some of it's rebellion," said one respondent in Phoenix. "[Teens believe that they] can thwart the laws of...[their] parents, [their] school, and God...whatever they want to rebel against."

**Lack of a Value System**

The most pervasive concern identified in the interviews was that teens lack values. Respondents agreed that teenagers get too little guidance in responsible decision-making and receive too much exposure to inappropriate values. Respondents felt that many parents fail to teach their kids how to treat other people properly and set bad examples themselves by engaging in promiscuous and risky behaviors. The media and peers were also cited as poor sources for values.

More broadly, respondents felt that the moral fiber of the country is fraying, which is severely affecting today's children. They singled out the media as a particularly

negative influence on what teenagers think about right versus wrong, how they should treat others, and how they should behave generally. Many also pointed to a breakdown in the family structure that prevents parents from passing on values to children. According to one participant:

> *If there isn't a value system at home that teaches it's not all right [to have sex and get pregnant], then you're not going to change it. And I think we've got to get our values back...There's got to be a value that it's not all right to be 14 and have a baby.*

Most parents said that *they* personally attempted to pass on values to their own children; however, in their view, too many other families are not doing the same. They asserted that parents have to be responsible enough to prepare their children for situations requiring moral judgment. Without appropriate values in place and some forethought about how to deal with tough situations, teenagers are more apt to make the "wrong" decisions in tough situations—especially those involving peer pressure. One participant in Baltimore suggested that teenagers have *different* value systems:

> *It's not that the children don't have values, it's just that the children's values are alien to the values we have. You know, they have their own set of values, and they operate within a framework around these values.*

Many respondents expressed concern that their own efforts to instill appropriate values in their teenagers might not have much impact when their teenagers faced a difficult decision. But even if external influences, such as the media or teens' peers, thwarted their efforts, respondents were resolute in their belief that values be instilled at home.

**Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy**

Given that respondents were informed of the research topic during recruitment and at the beginning of the group interviews, it is not surprising that sex and pregnancy were identified as serious problems by these parents and teen-involved adults. However, it does make it difficult to definitively assess the importance of teen sex and pregnancy as concerns if the groups had not been prompted.

Participants did, however, spend almost two hours in each group interview thoughtfully discussing teen pregnancy with a very sophisticated level of understanding. In fact, respondents were able to articulate almost all of the message points contained in the creative stimuli even prior to their presentation. This suggests that teen pregnancy is an issue they regard as very important, one that they have thought about and care about deeply.

When asked directly how serious they thought the pregnancy problem was, they responded by saying that it is "a large problem," and "right up there with drugs, gangs ...violence in general." They also believed it is an issue that teens think a great deal about, too. A teacher in Indianapolis said: "[Sex] is definitely something to be concerned with. Because [teens] talk about it all the time. That's all they talk about, more than drugs they talk about sex constantly."

Most respondents felt that teen pregnancy is an inevitable result of high levels of youthful sexual activity in the present social environment. As one respondent said, "You know, pregnancy just comes along with the issue of sex." Another felt that "when you're having sex, there's always that chance [that you'll get pregnant]."

The issue of self-esteem was brought up in every interview. Respondents argued that low self-esteem often leads to sexual activity with pregnancy as the outcome. Many believed that low self-esteem and lack of self-worth and self-confidence leads teenagers, especially girls, to engage in behaviors that they otherwise would not engage in. Much of the blame was placed on the households from which these teens come, households viewed as lacking in caring, nurturing, and emotional support. As a result, teenagers are provoked to search for love elsewhere, either from a boyfriend or girlfriend, or from the unconditional love a baby offers.

## Perceptions of Teen Pregnancy as a Problem

According to the respondents, teen pregnancy is a serious problem for both teens and their families as well as society at large—one that is becoming more serious with the passage of time. During the focus group interviews, the participants were asked to discuss whether they believed a teen pregnancy problem was inevitable, what they considered the main consequences of early pregnancy, how best to prevent it, and who should be responsible for prevention efforts.

### The Inevitability of Teen Pregnancy

Respondents disagreed about the inevitability of teenage pregnancy. Few thought that it could be completely prevented, however. As a participant in Indianapolis explained, "I think it's going to happen no matter what, but I think the percentage...can be lowered a little." Another respondent agreed:

> *You're just not going to prevent it. I think you can reduce it, and I think it's going to take several factors to reduce it...I don't believe you can prevent teen pregnancy [completely]. Teen pregnancy has been around for so long...The only difference today is that, I believe, it's more accepted.*

Some respondents, particularly in Baltimore, felt that no matter how much is invested in prevention some "teenage girls...want to have babies...because they want

someone to love, someone to take care of." In the other cities, respondents agreed that even the most effective prevention efforts will not reduce teen pregnancy by 100 percent. In Indianapolis, a respondent remarked:

> *While I agree that education would probably cut down 90 percent, you're still going to have a 10 percent out of ignorance. You're still going to have those people...that are going to jump out of a plane without the parachute. I think [education] could cut [teen pregnancy] down a lot, but I don't think it would inevitably get rid of it...The 10 percent, you'll never reach.*

Even some of those teens who "know better" will get pregnant or cause a pregnancy, they said, because even "good kids make bad mistakes." In Indianapolis, a parent illustrated this point:

> *My son goes to a private school and just this past year there were two pregnancies there... [One] girl was an outstanding student, excellent grades, popular in school, all the extra-curricular activities, everything. And [her family] just couldn't believe it.*

Respondents in several group interviews viewed teen pregnancy as a self-perpetuating problem, one associated with poverty, less education, and to a large extent, dysfunctional family structures, regardless of income or social class. They described a vicious cycle of "teens having babies who grow up to be teens who have babies" that is difficult to break. In Phoenix, one respondent linked this cycle to a lack of parenting skills:

> *Teens who have children don't have any parenting skills to pass on to these babies...So I see the problem just continuing generation after generation. The ones that we're seeing now–a lot of the things that they do, a lot of the values that they have...you can tell that they just haven't been taught. So...you just wonder where it's going to stop. Where it's going to end.*

In most interviews, the question of the impact of welfare reform came up. While the self-identified conservative respondents generally agreed with welfare-to-work programs, they also worry that forcing single mothers to work may lead to future teen pregnancies. They had difficulty reconciling their belief that mothers should stay at home with children with their support for putting welfare recipients to work. In the words of one Indianapolis participant:

*This welfare-to-work program is really creating a problem. It sounds good, but what's happening is that these teenage mothers and young adults are being put into the workforce, and our number one demand is for child care services. So, the opportunity to instill...values is really ripped away because that parent is not there. That responsibility is being shifted to a day care worker or somebody else.*

Finally, some respondents pointed to the inevitability of teenage pregnancies given the large number of teens who are sexually active. And while adults may not wish their teens to have sex, most respondents believed that this was an unrealistic expectation. Generally speaking, there was more acceptance of sexual activity among older adolescents (those aged 17-19) than among younger ones (those aged 16 or younger). Most respondents said that it was entirely acceptable for 18- and 19-year-olds to be married and have children, so they suggested that pregnancy prevention efforts be focused on younger teens.

**Consequences**

While the focus group respondents felt that teen pregnancy creates problems for everyone involved, they focused more on its effects on teens themselves, particularly the physical, emotional, and financial consequences of early parenting—which teens do not understand or anticipate. As one respondent noted, "Teens are amazed at who is pulled in—their friends, because they cannot go to the movies, because they have to buy diapers, et cetera."

"You have no idea how difficult it is to have that first baby," commented one participant. Some respondents said that if teens better understood how hard it is to care for babies, they might be more motivated to avoid pregnancy. In several groups, respondents spoke positively about school-based programs in which young people are asked to "take care" of computerized dolls, flour sacks, eggs, or other simulated baby objects.

Too-early pregnancy can stall teens' educational attainment, careers, and future income, and cause lost opportunities for fun and socializing with friends, according to the focus groups. A few respondents sadly noted that teenage pregnancy results in a "lost childhood" and "robbed innocence," especially for girls.

Respondents felt that teens' parents and family members are seriously affected by early pregnancies. Parents reacted negatively to the notion of "grandparents raising grandsons," and becoming grandparents at too early an age. They also identified societal consequences—added burdens on taxpayers, increased abortion rates, increased domestic violence, and continuing poverty—although most groups stressed the consequences for young people themselves and their families.

## Barriers to Teen Pregnancy Prevention

Focus group participants suggested a number of barriers to teen pregnancy prevention efforts in their initial discussion of the problem of teen pregnancy, including drug use, early onset of sexual activity, and immaturity. When their attention was focused explicitly on the question of barriers, however, respondents identified additional ones. Respondents discussed those that were within the teens themselves—knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skill deficiencies—as well as external barriers, such as the lack of parental involvement, negative media influences, peer pressure, lack of supervision and activities, and the inconsistency of messages emanating from various sectors of society.

### Teen Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs, and Skill Deficiencies

Few respondents felt that teenagers lack accurate information about the mechanics of sex. More felt that they lack an understanding of the real life complexities of conception and pregnancy avoidance. Many pointed to their own youthful ignorance, and their reliance on myths about conception and contraception, to explaining how young people are not able to comprehend fully the issues involved.

Respondents felt that teens are exposed to considerable information about pregnancy prevention, mostly at schools. As a respondent in Indianapolis explained:

> *I don't think there is a lack of sex education or information anymore...I mean, granted in the 60s and 70s there probably was, but at this point in time, in today's school, it seems like there's plenty of information out there.*

Many participants believed, however, that sex education does not necessarily lead to pregnancy avoidance.

> *Some [programs] that call themselves prevention programs are nothing more than a biology information course which has nothing to do, in my opinion, with teen pregnancy prevention.*

Teens' attitudes and beliefs about pregnancy are a powerful barrier to prevention, according to the focus groups. Some felt that teens believe that it is all right to be pregnant as a teenager. A Baltimore participant said: "To have a child at 16 years old is sort of...the 'in thing' to do...It's socially acceptable now...That's the reality."

Respondents complained that teens often feel invincible. As one participant explained:

> *[Teens say:] 'It's not a big deal. Everybody's doing it. It's everywhere.' And they don't see it as a big concern until it happens to them. 'It's not going to happen to me...I'm taking care of myself.' But it only takes a second.*

This sense of invincibility, coupled with a youthful vulnerability, was one explanation that participants offered for teen pregnancy. As a participant in Baltimore explained:

> *I think...adolescents...are vulnerable. If we talk about sex, talk about drugs, talk about values, they are vulnerable, but they don't see it that way. They're invincible and, again, they know everything and who are we to tell them to...exercise responsible behavior? It doesn't work.*

In some groups, respondents mentioned that lack of appropriate communication skills led to teen pregnancy. Teens are uncomfortable talking with their parents about sex and pregnancy. They also find it hard to negotiate risk-free dating relationships.

**Parents' Skill Deficiencies**

Both parents and teen-involved adults acknowledged that parents need better skills, most notably communication skills, in order to prevent teen pregnancy. In fact, adult deficiencies were cited more often than teen deficiencies as prevention barriers. Many respondents believed that parents need assistance in finding information and resources to help them overcome fear and learn how to talk with their children about "sex, love, and values." One parent in Indianapolis explained:

> *The...fear is that they'll ask you a question that you don't know how to answer. My son is good for that. He's been doing this since he was five; comes up with these crazy questions. What's an age-appropriate response to this and what's the accurate information to give? It's a challenge.*

Participants felt that, when faced with such a challenge, "a lot of people back off rather than wrestle with it," according to one. Referring to parents who avoid communication with their children, a teacher in Baltimore explained:

> *It goes back to communication...You've got to talk and I don't see enough of that with some of the students. Some of the parents don't even know their children...I know some of them better than some of their parents...There are some things that I know about them that these parents should know, they should be aware of...[Teenagers] just talk and sometimes that's all they want to do, they want to talk, they want someone to listen to them.*

In a few groups, respondents commented that they felt awkward about appearing hypocritical to their children, expecting them not to "make the same 'mistakes' [referring to sexual activity and drug use] that we did." Another respondent in Indianapolis said:

> *One of the things I hear a lot...is that parents are afraid to talk to their kids about drugs or sex issues because the kids will say, 'And what did you do?' And parents don't want to have to say, 'Yes, I had premarital sex,' or 'Yes, I did drugs, but you shouldn't.'*

One teen-involved adult felt that even those parents who do communicate with their children about sexuality and pregnancy might not be doing so in an effective manner:

> *The definition of communication means that the person who's getting the information can return it back...Many times I'm dealing with parents and they say, 'I taught my kid this, I taught my kid that.' Then I ask, 'How do you check? You're so sure your kid has learned, how do you check and monitor that your child has learned what you've been giving?' And most parents have never done that.*

**Lack of Parental Attention**

Many respondents expressed the sentiment that "there are so many parents out there that couldn't care less what their kids do." In every group, respondents related stories of neighborhood families with absent or irresponsible parents. Participants blamed a variety of causes for these situations—the need for both parents to work, the prevalence of single-parent households, lack of good parenting skills, and selfish parents too focused on their own lives and problems to actively participate in the lives of their children. Others pointed to immature parents who are unable to offer effective emotional support to their own children. As a parent in Baltimore explained:

> *I believe that a lot of the early sex goes back to poor relationships at home, that lack of emotional support. They're looking for love, they're looking for somebody to care about them. And without that emotional support they go looking for each other.*

An adult in Indianapolis expressed a similar feeling:

> *I know a lot of youth that I work with just seem to miss having that quality time with their parent or they don't have a parent, a caring adult, someone in their life that's*

*an adult that can have time with them...A lot of kids are missing that.*

One father told a story of being invited to his child's school to view a sex education film, which was attended by only "five people out of this whole...school. Five." Respondents felt that there are many parents who shun responsibility while expecting others to assume it. A participant in Indianapolis said:

*I think a lot of parents expect the school system just to give [kids] all the information; they don't have to take part in the encouragement or discussion about sexuality in the home. Parents have to take responsibility and if they're not doing that—taking responsibility to discuss with their children consequences and expectations and that kind of thing—then that's where something falls apart.*

**Lack of Supervision and Appropriate Activities**

Most respondents felt that kids have too much time to themselves, which can lead to sexual experimentation and other problems. They connected this to parents' lack of involvement in their kids' lives. Some respondents also said that many teens are simply not interested in school, sports, and other activities, and should be encouraged to participate more actively.

Respondents identified a lack of resources to support activities for teenagers. Particularly in Baltimore, participants pointed to community budget-cutting measures that have reduced resources and activities for teenagers. One Baltimore teen-involved adult said:

*This society has already written off a generation of teenagers, and I guess one of my biggest problems in working with this population is the lack of resources. It seems like more money is being spent to incarcerate a young male or young female than to educate [him or her about sex and teen pregnancy].*

Phoenix respondents also mentioned a lack of opportunities, such as recreation centers and school-sponsored extracurricular activities for teens, although one Phoenix respondent disagreed, stating "they're out there if you look for them." A few respondents pointed out that schools are too genuinely "strapped for money" to support activities that teens enjoy.

**Media Influence**

In every group, respondents placed much of the blame for teen sexual promiscuity

and pregnancies on television shows, movies, popular music, and entertainers. "The media is a negative," is how one respondent summed up its influence on teenagers today. "The TV lies," contended another participant, saying she had read about:

> *...an episode on one of the soaps where a teenager got pregnant, but the boy married the girl, he got a job, he got a scholarship, he became captain of the football team...On an afternoon soap, it all works out.*

Participants felt discouraged by their lack of control over the popular media that – as they put it—glorify violence, drugs, and sex. One Baltimore mother stated:

> *The media has more effect on my child than I do. He's not trying to hear what I'm saying. All he knows is what the television's talking about. And that gives him a whole lot of negative influence really because it makes all the things that we think are bad look good.*

A very few did say that they tried to shield their children from media, like gangsta rap music, R-rated movies, and nighttime soap operas, but most felt that this was an uphill battle. One respondent explained:

> *There's so many...general cultural and media messages that are so strong, so sexually potent, that I think that a lot of kids get to a point where, especially if they don't have the good grounding that some strong families can offer...is that they're getting the message that this is what's expected of them. Sex is expected. It's fun. They should be out there doing it.*

**Lack of Consistent Messages**

Many participants believed teens receive conflicting messages about pregnancy from parents, other adults, and society in general—particularly about the abstinence versus contraception issue. In Indianapolis, a teacher said:

> *You, as a young person, get two messages...In today's day and age, the kids have [adults they interact with] and then they have their parents. And I think you get so many different opinions coming their way, they start wondering...It's like, people are crossing boundaries that they shouldn't be crossing...A parent should have a right to say, 'I don't want you on birth control, I don't want you to take condoms and use them, because sex is wrong...' [Teens] have too many people telling them what's O.K. and what isn't O.K., and it's downright causing a lot of confusion.*

Some participants felt that the social support offered to pregnant teens gives kids a mixed message. As a parent in Phoenix explained:

> *We believe that teen pregnancy is not O.K., but we accept it every day. If someone has a child or a teen is pregnant, we're going to support them...both financially and emotionally.*

A participant in Indianapolis echoed this feeling:

> *If a girl turns up pregnant, the first thing people are going to say to her [is], 'It's O.K. Everything's going to be O.K.' [But] it's not going to be O.K... Morally, most people would say, 'No, [teen pregnancy is not O.K.],' but socially, they're saying, 'Well, it happens. What can we do?'*

Nevertheless, respondents did not believe that pregnant teens should be deprived of support. They simply saw it as another example of the complexity of the issue.

## Prevention Strategies

When asked what should be done to reduce teen pregnancy, participants suggested that "different teens get pregnant for different reasons, so there's no one formula." However, most agreed that maintaining open communication between parents and teens and instilling teens with values were the best strategies. Many referred to their own efforts to do both and suggested that they should be emulated by other parents and adults working with kids.

In general, most participants felt that prevention should begin at home—often emphasizing the importance of "family upbringing," "a strong family foundation," and a "good family background." The data suggest that many parents and teen-involved adults view prevention as a function of basic values "that have to come from the home," such as honest and open communication, knowing the difference between right and wrong, and the importance of making morally correct and responsible decisions in life.

Respondents felt that parents need to talk with their children about values, set clear limits, discuss the meaning of relationships (not just sex), and rehearse with children how to respond to specific types of peer pressure. An Indianapolis area resident argued:

> *It's initially what you put into them before [they become teenagers]. Because I keep trying to get our children to see [that they] have to adapt our values as [their] own...I always tell [my kids]: 'You have to make the decision before the question is asked. You have to already know the answer before you get to where you're going.'*

Focus group participants suggested that boys and girls must learn respect: parents should teach their sons to respect girls and should empower their daughters to respect their own bodies. Most respondents agreed that prevention must start early. A Baltimore participant said:

> *I think we have to start earlier, explaining to them why they shouldn't do certain things as far as having sex...Don't wait until the child is 12-years-old to start. Start at eight, nine, and ten and make them feel a self-worth about themselves so that they don't have to go to someone else to look for those feelings.*

Other parents, especially in Phoenix and Indianapolis, described Christian values that they worked to instill in their children, including that "sex is for marriage and is a gift from God." Other parents, even those who did not express strong religious beliefs, pointed to abstinence as the only true method for prevention, teaching that "it's not O.K. to have sex until marriage," and "sex is more than just having fun."

Respondents had mixed views about the importance of organized activities for teenagers as a means of pregnancy prevention. Many supported the idea of supervised activities as one strategy to help teens avoid situations where they could be sexually active. Others felt that such programs wouldn't prevent a teenager who wanted to have sex from having it.

Finally, some respondents in each group reluctantly supported the use of contraceptives, notably oral contraceptives and condoms, to prevent pregnancy. They seemed conflicted about doing so, but felt that it was necessary given the threat of both pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Others opposed this as a prevention strategy.

**Responsibility for Prevention**

The question of who should bear the responsibility for preventing teen pregnancy proved controversial. Almost everyone placed primary responsibility with parents, yet many recognized the essential role of the community, schools, and other institutions, particularly when parents could not or would not accept the responsibility. Some respondents supported the concept that "it takes a village to raise a child" and that "we are all" responsible for helping prevent teen pregnancy, but a number of respondents worried about the emphasis some institutions place on contraceptive-based approaches or simply questioned the effectiveness of non-parents in this domain.

The primary responsibility for teaching values supportive of pregnancy prevention should rest with parents, according to the focus groups participants, especially the parents. Parents were more likely to be skeptical of schools, government, community organizations, and the media because they fear that these institutions send mixed

messages to teens, especially on the issue of abstinence versus contraception. Some respondents clearly worried that schools are not able to teach the values that parents want taught. A respondent in Phoenix argued that "the schools are not really allowed to teach values anymore...they can only teach physical facts." Parents did believe that religious-affiliated organizations could better promote their kinds of values.

Some parent respondents reacted negatively to the notion of communities, or community institutions, being responsible for preventing teen pregnancy, although it was clear from their comments that they equated "community" with "government." Most parents felt that community institutions should play a secondary role by reinforcing what is taught in the home.

Teen-involved adult respondents, on the other hand, were more supportive of community and institutional involvement for two reasons. First, it was closer to their own experience as teachers, clergy, and youth workers. Second, these respondents were more likely to believe that many parents do not do a good job of helping their teens avoid pregnancy. As a teen-involved adult in Indianapolis stated:

> *I think we're missing a whole population of kids that...don't have this 'rapport' with their parents [and other adults]...As far as what values are being passed down, what about when no values [are] being passed down? Because that's the kids I deal with.*

Another respondent felt the same way:

> *Some of the teens that you really need to reach are not the ones that are going to church, are not involved in youth groups, [but] are on the street corners, fending for themselves...Those are the kids who are really at danger, because they're not getting the structure of...something organized and those are the ones that we have to be the most worried about.*

These and similar comments often gave both parent and non-parent respondents pause. While many parent respondents claimed to communicate with their kids, instill values, lay down rules, and check on their teenage children, they believed that many parents did not do these things. In Baltimore, a respondent summarized the views of many when he said:

> *We've got to realize, 'O.K., this is how the parent is.' We know the situation. We know that the parent has problems. What can we do with these parents? What we need to do is look at the parent and say, 'What can the community do to assist*

*you with [your] kids?' Because we...as the community...have to realize, 'O.K., this is a mother...who has certain problems...and one of the problems is...your boy may go out there and get some girl pregnant...but how can we, as a community, assist you with him?'*

Finally, participants believed that because of its enormous influence on teens, the media must clean up its act. Other individuals or institutions that some respondents thought should be involved included teens themselves (especially in peer educator roles), teen role models and others who teens "look up to," as well as churches and synagogues.

**Support for Teen Pregnancy Prevention**

Focus group respondents were asked to describe what kinds of support they believed that parents, teens, and the community need in order to prevent teen pregnancy.

*For Parents*

Although most parents felt that they do a fairly good job of preparing their own teenagers to avoid pregnancy, some acknowledged inadequacies in communicating about sensitive subjects. Almost everyone agreed that many parents needed help to openly and honestly communicate with their children about sex, love, relationships, and all the other issues related to pregnancy avoidance. Many suggested parents should be given support to become more comfortable and skilled in having these kinds of conversations. In Indianapolis, a respondent offered that "maybe the answer is sex education for adults rather than sex education for the kids." A few spoke positively about communication classes and seminars offered through religious organizations, which could also provide a useful forum for parents to discuss teenage- and sex-related issues with their peers.

*For Teens*

In most focus groups, parents and teen-involved adults felt that the best way to prevent teen pregnancy is to "keep the kids busy." Providing parent-sanctioned and supervised activities may not prevent all sexual experimentation, they argued, but it may reduce the amount of sex taking place. Others disagreed, suggesting that "no matter how busy you keep them, they're going to find time to have sex...if they want to."

Other respondents supported school-based family life classes that teach kids what parenting actually entails, such as those discussed earlier in which students must care for an object as if it were a baby. Many respondents felt that sexuality education classes offered at primary and secondary schools were sufficiently teaching kids "the basics" or "the mechanics" of sex, but were inadequate for actually changing students' sexual behaviors. A minority believed that sex education leads to increased sexual activity, although most participants objected to this notion. One respondent

suggested that "we drown [teens] with sex education" with little effect in terms of pregnancy prevention.

The best support for teens, participants agreed, is open communication between parents and children. Teenagers need to be listened to and parents need to be comfortable talking about sexuality, relationships, and related topics. One Baltimore respondent emphasized the importance of communication on multiple levels: "It's the communication between the parent, the child, the teacher, and the people in the community. It's just total communication."

***Community Support***

Most respondents felt that community institutions—schools, churches, and neighborhood recreation centers—should support teen pregnancy prevention. Some respondents felt it important to keep young teens occupied in healthy and wholesome activities, such as the numerous programs operated by the Boys and Girls Clubs, schools, and various government agencies. Although they recognized that these opportunities are not always sought out by the young people, most respondents viewed them favorably. One respondent offered a comment on the success of community programs:

> *If you provide [teenagers] with something that's relevant and that's challenging, you can take up the majority of their energy and time, keeping [them] away from the TV set, keeping them away from some other kind of external factors that they are dealing with. You will find that children who are successful...who [do not] become pregnant at an early age are children who are not only challenged in school, but...also in the community.*

One respondent felt that schools should have a better mechanism for evaluating students and helping each student to identify his or her own "niche"—something he or she is good at—to promote self-esteem and self-confidence.

A few respondents suggested that more young entertainers and sports figures should publicly encourage sexual responsibility and convince teens that abstinence is socially acceptable.

## Results from Presentation of Message Executions and Motivational Concepts

To stimulate discussion among participants, the National Campaign, with the assistance of the advertising firm Ogilvy and Mather, developed a series of 20 simple teen pregnancy prevention messages and three overarching motivational concepts, which were presented to the focus groups on poster boards with illustrations for their reactions. After the first two groups, the focus group leaders agreed that there was not enough time to respond to all of the boards, so the number was pared down to eleven message executions and three motivational concepts. Respondents were asked three questions about each message to assess its credibility, motivational appeal, and emotional effect.

- Do you believe it? Why or why not? (Credibility)
- Would it make you want to do anything? If so, what? (Motivational appeal)
- How does it make you feel, if any way at all? (Emotional effect)

General observations about their answers to these questions are offered first, then reactions to each of the eleven executions (1-11) and three motivational concepts (A-C) are described in detail.

### Credibility

Respondents agreed that all of the message elements—the headline, subhead, and visual—of four message executions were credible: #4, #6, #7, and #10 (see pp. 35-41). However, there was at least one phrase, subhead, or concept in other message executions that respondents found believable, including:

- "Babies need and deserve committed parents."
- "We need to change the boys' behavior as well as the girls'."
- "Find time to talk/Get comfortable talking to your teens about sex, love, and values."
- "Teens need you now more than ever."
- "If you don't teach your kids values, [the media] will."

### Motivational Appeal

Several messages inspired participants "to talk" to someone—in most cases, to a teenager. In fact, they identified a few as good conversation-starters with teenagers. Some respondents felt they could be more motivating if the messages included suggestions for actions parents could take immediately, like join a discussion, attend a conference, or take a class. One respondent mentioned that because baby boomers do not like to admit that they "can't do it all," they would be more likely to seek help if they realize that other parents also need assistance.

## Emotional Effect

Only a few messages seemed to have an emotional effect on the respondents. Participants enjoyed the humorous tone of a couple of executions, and one humorous message elicited both positive and negative responses. Other message executions left some respondents feeling "frustrated" at their lack of control over situations involving teenagers. Some participants felt "guilty" in reaction to a couple of message executions.

Overall, messages that focused on "pregnancy prevention" but are not limited to "sex" and "sexual activity" seemed to work best. The word "values" was particularly well-received by all groups. Respondents seemed to agree that prevention requires a holistic approach addressing the psychological, behavioral, moral, and social variables that predispose teenagers to get pregnant; it is not just about abstinence or contraception.

# When it comes to decisions about sex, this is who most teenage girls listen to. 3 out of 4 teenage girls have sex because a boy wants them to.

**№ 1**

*Illustration: photo of teen boy*

Initial reaction to this message by the focus groups was very mixed. In about half of the groups, the majority agreed that boys are responsible for most teenagers' decisions to engage in sex. Adult male respondents often revealed that their own experiences as teenagers supported this. "Boys seem to have more of an upper hand," said one, indicating that they seem to be more confident than girls. "Sons have the control," commented one respondent.

In the other groups, some vocal respondents disliked this message; they believed it could disempower girls and unfairly attacks boys, because, as one said, "It takes two to tango." This sentiment was expressed most strongly in Baltimore, and especially among African-American males, although respondents in both Phoenix and Indianapolis also responded negatively to the message execution. In one Baltimore group, there was discussion of a public service announcement on television by "Campaign for Our Children" that depicted an African-American male teenager as a "rat," which may have influenced respondents' negative attitudes toward this message.

A Baltimore participant explained her disagreement with the message this way: "I think a lot of teenage girls [who] have sex do it because they want to...I think [the message] places blame on the boys, and I think that's wrong." In Indianapolis, a youth recreation specialist said: "It is pinpointing a young guy as being the main problem why a girl has sex. Second, it's taking the power away from a female...it demeans a female." This sentiment was echoed by a respondent in Phoenix. "It sounds like the boys are in charge and the girls have nothing between their ears, and I think that's wrong."

A few also doubted the statistic, "three out of four," and one thought that this information could make boys even more aggressive in pressuring girls, while another thought that this mistakenly reinforces a belief that 75 percent of teenage girls are sexually active. Another doubted that many 13-year-olds (as teenagers) have sex.

There seemed to be general agreement that teenage girls are influenced by a variety of factors besides boys and boyfriends, including their girlfriends, the media, and general cultural messages. In addition, almost everyone agreed that teenage girls can be very sexually assertive.

This message execution made one parent feel frustrated—that all the virtues and morals taught by parents to a teenage girl could be destroyed and forgotten in one night by a persuasive boy. Beyond that, this message didn't seem to have much of an emotional effect on the respondents.

It made one respondent want to talk to the boy in the message and ask: "Why? Why would you want to coerce someone to do something like this?" A number of respondents felt motivated to talk to their sons, while a few felt moved to talk to their daughters, and a respondent in Indianapolis said it motivated her to talk to her son's girlfriend. The majority felt that this message is aimed at parents of teenage boys.

# Just a reminder: the 1 million teenage girls that got pregnant last year didn't do it alone. We have to change the boys' behavior as much as the girls'.

## No 2

*Illustration: two photos, one of a teen girl and one of a teen boy*

Respondents preferred this message execution to the first one. One respondent said, "[Message #1] just places blame. [Message #2] tells you you should talk to them about it." This message sparked a bit more debate around male responsibility. Respondents felt it conveyed the idea that boys are involved and that pregnancy is not a problem only for girls. They also liked the second line because it was directly instructed parents to talk to their sons and daughters about boys' behavior.

In one group, a mother of sons felt that "boys have a bigger part in it," and that we should acknowledge that "boys have the upper hand." A mother of a daughter, however, felt that more responsibility rests with the girls. A few others agreed that females have all the power; they control the situation and they should be taught to think for themselves and make their own decisions concerning sex. Meanwhile, one father of both a son and daughter felt that responsibility rests equally with both genders, while another father of two felt that "the woman has got control of the whole situation."

Overall, this message had a more positive effect on the respondents than the first message, especially in Baltimore among African-Americans who felt that males were too often accused of being at fault.

One respondent said that this message would make her "want to go out and be a speaker and talk to [parents of teenage boys]" about involvement in their sons' lives. Most also felt inspired to talk to their sons about responsibility.

# No 3 Research shows grown-ups make the best parents. Babies need and deserve committed parents.

Participants expressed overwhelming disagreement with the first line of the message, but very positive support for the second. Most everyone asserted that "grown-ups" implies an emotional maturity that adults do not always possess. "There are some pretty bad grown-ups that are parents!" exclaimed a participant in Indianapolis. One respondent noted that "parents need to be taught and need to grow up, especially the fathers." On the other hand, respondents felt that teens sometimes think of themselves as being very "mature," and this message would confuse them. A few suggested that "grown-ups" be replaced with "committed parents" or "adults" and "babies" should be replaced with "all children."

Some respondents felt that this message would be offensive to teen parents who are dedicated and committed. One mother, who had been a teen parent herself, explained: "I was not grown up when I was a parent, and I'll be the first to say that I was a damned good parent when I was 17 years old because I worked, and I was there for my kid."

In terms of motivation, a few respondents thought that this message might serve as a good conversation-starter with their teens.

# No 4

# You need to finish being a kid before you become a parent. Adolescence is for education and skill-building, not for pregnancy and parenthood.

There was almost 100 percent agreement with this message. One mother said it is exactly what she says to her teens: "Enjoy being a kid." Another agreed, saying "It's a phrase that I've used, telling my children, you know, 'These are some of your best years.'"

Respondents agreed with the idea behind the second sentance but had some concerns about the wording. Some thought that "adolescence" was either too limiting (teens do not think of themselves as adolescents) or its meaning too sophisticated or unclear. There was also agreement about adding the word "fun" to the bottom statement, and some disagreement over including the word "skill-building," because it might not appeal to teens.

Some participants suggested that this message should be used to encourage teens to set goals for themselves. One respondent offered this language: "Do everything you've ever dreamed of and then become a parent." The U.S. Army slogan, "Be all you can be," was invoked in a couple of groups.

In terms of motivational quality, one respondent thought that a teen who saw this message might think "I'd like to finish playing before I have to accept too much responsibility." A few parents thought that it might inspire them to talk to their children about their futures. Others thought that it was not very motivational, but they "would like to see it in schools." Overall, this was one of the best-liked messages.

# No 5 Just think. In four years he'll father a child. Teenagers don't exactly make the best parents.

*Illustration: a photo of a freckeled ten- year-old boy with french fries stuck in his ears and nostrils*

A few participants thought this message was humorous, but most found it offensive. Respondents in one group did not like the definitive nature of the message. "It's as if every kid acts this way," said one. A few respondents also felt that it might offend those few teen parents who do a good job. As one said, "I know a girl that was 16, and she's a better parent than I'll ever be." A few felt that the message could be better worded, suggesting that just because teens might be physiologically able to have a child, they do not have to be burdened with adult responsibilities.

The reaction to the second sentence of the statement was mixed. The majority seemed to feel that "most of the time" it is true that "teenagers don't exactly make the best parents." Others, however, felt that it was too ambiguous and instead should be stated clearly: "Teens don't make good parents."

There was some laughter in reaction to this message (likely because of the picture), but little other emotional effect. Most respondents agreed that this message was not motivational at all.

# This child needs her parents as much as this one does. Find time to talk to your teens about sex, love, and values. They need you now more than ever.

## No 6

*Illustration: two photos—one of a teen girl ("this child"), the other of an infant ("this one")*

"That's perfect," "That's good," "That's great," and "Amen!" were some immediate reactions to this message. Nearly everyone agreed with it. Many respondents particularly appreciated the words "need you now more than ever." One respondent felt that, in fact, teens need even more attention from parents as they grow older, in spite of the differences that develop between a parent and a child. Most everyone agreed that an open dialogue between parents and children is a very healthy goal, and this message reinforces that. One respondent commented on the "wholeness" of the message—it gives directions: explains the problem, explains what to do about it, and explains why. Respondents very much liked the inclusion of the word "values" in the bottom phrase. A couple of participants suggested adding the word "goals" to "sex, love, and values."

One parent commented that this message changed her attitude toward her older children and challenged her to think about the older ones as much as the younger ones. Others agreed that this message serves as a very nice reminder to talk with their older children. As one respondent said, "We all agree...that a lot of prevention of teen pregnancy is based on what is taught in the home and instilled in the household. This reminds the parents to do it."

# No 7 Sex/love. We need to teach our kids the difference. Get comfortable talking to your kids about sex, love, and values.

"Oh, yeah, that hits home" and "that's perfect" were two immediate reactions to the presentation of this message. Almost all respondents were in strong agreement with the message, although a few participants in one group said teaching teenagers the difference between sex and love is an impossible task.

The respondents suggested that the message is open to at least two readings: (1) teach your kids they don't have to have sex to be in love, and (2) teach your kids that love means being responsible about sex.

As with message #6, respondents very much liked the use of the word "values." While some admitted discomfort in talking to their teens about sex, they said the words "love" and "values" might allow them to open up a dialogue that could lead to a discussion of sex.

Some suggested that the difference between sex and love should be "emphasized with the boys [because] men have a more difficult time understanding the difference." Respondents felt that girls interpret "love" differently than boys, and boys use this difference to persuade girls to have sex. Some respondents applied this concept to message #1—"When it comes to decisions about sex, this is who most teenage girls listen to"—suggesting it would be less offensive to discuss how boys use "love" as a persuasive tactic than stating simply that girls have sex because boys want them to.

Respondents felt that this message serves as a good reminder, but felt it should include information on where parents can seek help. Most thought that this message would be a good conversation-starter with their children.

# Your kids get home at 3:00. You get home at 7:00. Chances are they're not playing Candyland in between. Knowing what your kids are doing doesn't make you a nag. It makes you a parent.

## No. 8

Although most respondents seemed to agree with this message, there was cool reception to it in a few groups. One person said, "[I'm] glad that someone finally said it," while others said "I hate that one," and "I hate it because it's real." Most agreed that it is important to know what kids are doing at all times, and no one had a problem with appearing as a "nag;" however, a couple respondents suggested that some parents who feel guilty about working try to make up for it by acting like a friend to their kids rather than a parent—which teens take advantage of. A mother in Phoenix pointed out that "even if [kids] hate you, they appreciate the fact that you care enough to want to know where they're at and what they're doing."

One mother said she felt "frustrated that [her kids] have to be home alone...and you can't afford the proper child care." A few respondents appreciated that the sentiment was similar to the well-known question: "Parents, do you know where your kids are?"

This message provoked some guilt among working parents, but it is unclear whether the guilt would motivate parents to take action or would turn them off. One mother said, "It [makes] me [want to] make sure that my kids aren't at home having sex while I'm out." On the other hand, another respondent said, "All it does is make people that are working class people working hard feel bad about it." Most agreed that there might be a better way of reminding parents to monitor their kids and them involved in organized activities. Others expressed a desire to have better and more affordable afterschool programs, "to have activities available for them so that they can do things they can enjoy."

# No. 9 If you don't teach your kids values, Aaron Spelling will. TV teaches kids that it's okay to have sex and get pregnant. You have to teach them that it's not.

Given their earlier criticism of the media and television especially, it was not surprising that this humorous message seemed to work well. Immediate reactions included "right," "that's very true," and "I like it." Almost all respondents agreed with this statement, although a few disagreed with the sentence stating that TV "teaches kids that it's okay to have sex and get pregnant."

Respondents said this message reminds parents to explain to their children the difference between TV and real life. While parents cannot keep their kids from exposure to popular media, responsible parents can act as a filter and, in fact, use TV as a learning tool by talking with their kids, they said. As one respondent said, "Nobody can counterattack a TV but the [parent] who's home who knows what's on it." Another agreed, saying, "You can have your kids watch TV and teach them as they're watching it. 'Is that right?' [I ask them.] That's what I'll do with them. [Then] he says, 'Is that right?'"

One respondent said this message would make her want to tell a TV station to change a program, but not many others felt inspired to try such advocacy. Most respondents said this message made them want to talk to their kids about TV. Among the 11 messages, this was one of the most well-liked.

# The time to prevent teen pregnancy is long before they're teens. Teenage pregnancy is not inevitable. Prevention starts early. №10

This message was met with applause in one group. Some participants admitted that they began too late with their kids, but said this would serve as a good reminder to "do it a little at a time; it has to be reinforced all the time." Respondents in one group liked "prevent teen pregnancy" because it allows options that teens can consider, including abstinence, contraception, or abortion (although they asserted that abortion is not a preferred method of pregnancy prevention).

One respondent suggested that parents who had not started early with their kids would not be affected by this message, and, in fact, may be turned off by it. Another advised that this message should be directed to parents of young children, not parents of teens.

The majority agreed that this message validates parents who have been communicating with their children about pregnancy prevention. As one said, "[I] preach and practice it daily." For others, it was felt that the message would inspire some thought about communicating with their teens.

# No 11 You can't get pregnant playing basketball. Or at a job. Or painting pictures. Communities need to find attractive alternatives for teenagers.

There was mixed reaction to the first line of the message; in fact, one respondent mentioned knowing someone who did get pregnant playing basketball (actually, it was a male basketball player who impregnated a teenage girl). In one group, respondents disagreed with the concept of community participation in pregnancy prevention, explaining that "because you build a basketball court in the middle of the ghetto, [it] is not going to stop teen pregnancy." One respondent disagreed with the message's premise "that a particular activity is where the solution is. I think the solution is with the parents, and the love, and the caring, and the value system that they get there." Most participants agreed, however, that kids need to be kept busy, that extracurricular activities are important, and that communities should help support such activities.

Almost everyone agreed with the last line—that communities should help support and encourage teenagers to participate in activities. The concept of "it takes a village to raise a child" was mentioned positively in several groups, but a few respondents commented that the "village" does not exist in today's cities. There may be some confusion over the word "community." To some, it implies government-sponsored activities, which for them has a negative connotation; to most, however, community refers to the "village" concept.

Mostly, however, this message was treated very positively. One person responded, "That would be something that I would most definitely try to let another child see." Others said that this was a good way to speak to the community and to encourage everyone to get involved.

Some respondents felt motivated to take some action about finding, protecting, or supporting "attractive alternatives" for teens. Beyond seeking government support, one respondent felt strongly that sports, science, and business industries should also be involved.

## The Problem of Teen Pregnancy is Worse Than You Think A

This concept was presented in only the first few groups, because it was clear that it did not resonate with the participants at all. Respondents reacted negatively to it, and it seemed to be insulting to some. The statement appears to be motivationally ineffective.

## Teenage Pregnancy is Not OK B

There was mixed reaction to this statement. For some, it seemed to suggest that no teenager should ever get pregnant, not allowing for some situations where teenage pregnancy might be O.K., such as for a married 18-year-old. As a Phoenix participant explained:

> *You're saying every teenager has no right to get pregnant...Maybe some people at 18 years old, they plan to get married and they want to get married, and they're mature enough, and they have their baby, and everything works out fine...You cannot stereotype all teenagers and say no teenager has a right to get pregnant.*

The message also implied, to some respondents, that pregnant teens should be condemned:

> *It implies that you should do something with teens who have already become pregnant. And, you know, it implies abortion...must be done. I don't think that's true. I think once a teen is pregnant, whether it's planned or not, whether they're ready or not, I think we, as a society, need to...support them and take care of them anyway.*

Another respondent agreed: "When you say teen pregnancy is not O.K., you look at the child who has the baby. O.K. It's after the fact. So, are you going to condemn this child after she has the baby? No. We don't want to do that." Others believed that this message did not condemn teen parents; even teen parents would agree that parenting is tough and being a teen parent is not cool, and they would do things differently if they could.

One respondent, having seen all the message executions, said that this statement is "the best one of all."

# C Teenage Pregnancy is Not Inevitable if We Get Involved

There was also mixed reaction to this concept. Some believed it very strongly, while others hardly reacted to it at all. Most said that it was too long and complicated to be easily understood, which might be a factor influencing respondent reactions. Some respondents felt that the statement implies that a 100 percent reduction in teen pregnancy is possible, which they did not believe. Others agreed with the statement, contending that in order for there to be a reduction in teen pregnancy, more people have to get involved including teens, parents, and the broader community.

# Appendix 1: Focus Group Specifications

## Prepared By: Communication Sciences Group

Nine focus groups of 8-10 persons (recruiting 12 for each group); three groups each in 3 cities:

**Phoenix:**

Group 1: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17[1], who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, at least 1/3 Hispanic, lower income[2]; and teen-involved adults[3] working/interacting with 12- to 17-year-old, lower income, Hispanic children.

Group 2: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, mix of race/ethnicity[4] (standard mix, i.e., no more than 4, no less than 2 of any one race), lower/middle income.

Group 3: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, middle income, at least 1/3 Hispanic; and teen-involved adults working with 12- to 17-year-old, middle income Hispanic children.

**Baltimore:**

Group 1: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, at least 1/3 African American, lower income; and teen-involved adults working/interacting with 12- to 17-year-old, lower income, African-American children.

Group 2: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, mix of race/ethnicity, lower/middle income.

Group 3: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, at least 1/3 African American, middle income; and teen-involved adults working/interacting with 12- to 17-year-old, middle income, African-American children.

**Indianapolis:**

Group 1: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, lower income; and teen-involved adults working/interacting with lower income 12- to 17-year-old children.

Group 2: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, lower/middle income.

Group 3: Parents (mothers and fathers) of children aged 12-17, who hold a variety of beliefs about pregnancy prevention efforts, middle income; and teen-involved adults working/interacting with middle income, 12- to 17-year-old children.

**Recruitment Strategy**

Sample purchased in cities (by zip code) to recruit parents.

Network-based approach (through schools, clubs, and organizations) to recruit teen-involved adults.

**Endnotes**

1 Note that we should have a mix of parents with male and female children, i.e., not all parents with only daughters aged 12-17; having both a son and daughter is fine.

2 Note that lower income = household income < $30k; lower/middle = $30-40k; middle income = > $40k

3 Note that teen-involved adults include the following kind of influencers: teachers, coaches, clergy, youth recreation specialists, community outreach workers, etc.

4 Note that a "standard mix" means no less than two persons or more than four persons of any one racial/ethnic group will be included.

## Appendix 2: Focus Group Screening Questionnaire

## Prepared By: Communication Sciences Group

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____
Time: _____

Hello. My name is _____ from Survey Methods Group, a research company in San Francisco. We're putting together a series of small discussion groups with parents, teachers, and other persons involved with teenagers in your area for the purpose of opinion research.

S1. Is there anyone in your household who is a parent or legal guardian[1] of a child aged 12 to 17?

Yes ASK Q S3
No ASK Q S2

S2. Is there an adult in your household who is involved either through work, volunteering, or some other way with children aged 12 to 17 on a regular (at least weekly) basis?

Yes ASK Q S3
No THANK/TERMINATE

S3. (IF "YES" in S1 or S2) Could you please tell me the person's first name, gender, and whether the person is a parent or not? (RECORD NAME, GENDER, AND PARENT STATUS)

| | Name | Gender (M/F) | Parent (Y/N) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | _____ | _____ | _____ | (IF "YES," Go to Section A.) |
| 2. | _____ | _____ | _____ | (IF "NO," Go to Section B.) |

(IF "YES" TO BEING A PARENT, ASK TO SPEAK TO PARENT AND GO TO **SECTION A**. IF "NO" TO BEING A PARENT, ASK TO SPEAK TO ADULT WHO IS INVOLVED WITH TEENAGERS AND GO TO **SECTION B**.)

## Section A: PARENTS

(WHEN SPEAKING WITH SAME PERSON) As I told the other person on the telephone... (PICK UP IF RESPONDENT IS SAME) We're putting together a series of small discussion groups with parents, teachers, and other persons involved with teenagers in your area for the purpose of opinion research.

These focus groups are being conducted for a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to preventing teen pregnancy. The purpose of these group discussions is to better understand issues related to teen pregnancy around the country and what campaign messages might be most persuasive in changing attitudes and behaviors of opinion leaders, parents, other adults, and teens themselves.

A focus group is a roundtable discussion led by a moderator. Usually it's a small group of about 8 to 10 people. The moderator is there to present topics and to get feedback on them from everyone around the table. All the answers given in the group interviews and in this brief qualifying interview will be kept strictly confidential. We will pay you $50 for your time and input *if you qualify for the group*. Usually the group lasts about one and one-half hours.

1. Does this sound like something you would like to participate in — (1) yes or (2) no?

   (1) Yes — ASK Q2
   (2) No — THANK/TERMINATE

2. Have you participated in a focus group for public opinion research in the past six months – (1) yes or (2) no?

   (1) Yes — THANK/TERMINATE
   (2) No — ASK Q3

3. I just need to ask you a few questions to make sure you qualify for the group. First, how old are you? _____

4. Are you currently employed outside of the home, full-time or part-time – (1) Yes or (2) No?

   (1) Yes, full- or part-time — ASK Q5
   (2) No — SKIP TO Q6

5. And what is your occupation? (RECORD BELOW, PROBE FULLY)

   _____

(IF OCCUPATION IS RELATED TO ADVERTISING, MARKETING, OR PUBLIC RELATIONS, THANK/TERMINATE.)

6. Is anyone in your household employed in the field of advertising, marketing, or public relations – (1) Yes or (2) No?

(1) Yes THANK/TERMINATE
(2) No ASK Q7

7. Could you please tell me how many children aged 12-17 you are a parent to, by telling me their gender and age? (RECORD GENDER [BOY/GIRL] AND AGE.)

| | Gender (Boy/Girl) | Age | | Gender (Boy/Girl) | Age |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | _____ | _____ | 2. | _____ | _____ |
| 3. | _____ | _____ | 4. | _____ | _____ |

8. For our study, it is important to speak with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Do you consider yourself: (READ LIST)

(1) African-American/Black _____
(2) Asian/Pacific Islander _____
(3) Caucasian _____
(4) Hispanic/Latino _____
(5) Native-American _____

9. And which of the following categories best describes your total annual household income before taxes? Is it: (READ LIST)

| | | No. in household | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Less than $25,000 | _____ | _____ | [SEE CHART] |
| $25,000 to $35,000 | _____ | _____ | [SEE CHART] |
| $25,000 to $35,000 | _____ | _____ | [SEE CHART] |
| $35,000 to $45,000 | _____ | _____ | [SEE CHART] |
| $45,000 to $55,000 | _____ | _____ | [SEE CHART] |
| More than $55,000 | _____ | _____ | [SEE CHART] |

10. How many persons are there in your household? (INSERT NUMBER IN TABLE ABOVE NEXT TO HOUSEHOLD INCOME LEVEL YOU CHECKED FOR Q9 and CHECK ATTACHED CHART FOR ELIGIBILITY AND GROUP DESIGNATION.)

11. Finally, I'd like to ask you just a couple of questions about your political affiliations.

a) Even if you aren't a registered voter, could you please tell me what political

party best represents your political opinions – Is it Democrat, Republican, or Independent?

| | |
|---|---|
| Democrat | _____ |
| Republican | _____ |
| Independent | _____ |
| Other | _____ |
| Refused | _____ |

b) And on the majority of social issues facing this country today, how would you characterize your leanings – Would you say you are: mostly liberal, somewhat liberal, neither liberal/nor conservative, somewhat conservative, or mostly conservative?

| | |
|---|---|
| Mostly liberal | _____ |
| Somewhat liberal | _____ |
| Neither liberal/ conservative | _____ |
| Somewhat conservative | _____ |
| Mostly conservative | _____ |

(GO TO SECTION C: QUALIFIED, SIGN-UP)

## Section B: TEEN-INVOLVED ADULTS[2]

(WHEN SPEAKING WITH SAME PERSON) As I told the other person on the telephone... (PICK UP IF RESPONDENT IS SAME) We're putting together a series of small discussion groups with parents, teachers, and other persons involved with teenagers in your area for the purpose of opinion research.

These focus groups are being conducted for a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to preventing teen pregnancy. The purpose of these group discussions is to better understand issues related to teen pregnancy around the country and what campaign messages might be most persuasive in changing attitudes and behaviors of opinion leaders, parents, other adults, and teens themselves.

A focus group is a roundtable discussion led by a moderator. Usually it's a small group of about 8 to 10 people. The moderator is there to present topics and to get feedback on them from everyone around the table. All the answers given in the group interviews and in this brief qualifying interview will be kept strictly confidential. We will pay you $50 for your time and input. Usually the group lasts about one and one-half hours.

1. Does this sound like something you would like to participate in — (1) yes or (2) no?

(1) Yes ASK Q2
(2) No THANK/TERMINATE

2. Have you participated in a focus group for public opinion research in the past six months – (1) yes or (2) no?

(1) Yes THANK/TERMINATE
(2) No ASK Q3

3. I just need to ask you a few questions to make sure you qualify for the group. First, how old are you?

_____

4. Are you currently employed outside of the home, full-time or part-time?

(1) Yes, full- or part-time CONTINUE
(2) No CONTINUE

5. Is anyone in your household employed in the field of advertising, marketing, or public relations – (1) Yes or (2) No?

(1) Yes THANK/TERMINATE
(2) No ASK Q6

6. For our study, we are interested in talking with people, in addition to parents, who interact with and influence teenagers on a regular basis. You indicated that you do. Could you please tell me whether you – (1) earn a living working with teenagers, (2) volunteer with teenagers, or (3) are involved with teenagers in another way?

(1) Work CONTINUE
(2) Volunteer CONTINUE
(3) Other CONTINUE

7. Could you please tell me what you do that involves working or interacting with teens? (IF NOT OBVIOUS RESPONSE, e.g., "TEACHER," "BOY SCOUTS VOLUNTEER," etc., PROBE FOR HOW THE POSITION INVOLVES TEENAGERS.)

**Occupation/Volunteer Position:** _____

**How involves teens:** _____

8. How would you describe the majority of teenagers with whom you are involved in terms of race or ethnicity and household income? Would you say the teens are – (1) Mostly Caucasian, (2) Mostly Hispanic, (3) Mostly African-American, (4) An even mix of races, or (5) A different race?

| | |
|---|---|
| (1) Caucasian | CONTINUE |
| (2) Hispanic | CONTINUE |
| (3) African-American | CONTINUE |
| (4) Mix | CONTINUE |
| (5) Other/Specify: _____ | |

9. And how would you describe their economic backgrounds, based on household income? Would you say most of the teens you interact with come from – (1) lower-income households, (2) middle-income households, (3) mixed income levels, or (4) middle- to upper-income households?

| | |
|---|---|
| (1) Lower-income | CONTINUE |
| (2) Middle-income | CONTINUE |
| (3) Mixed income | CONTINUE |
| (4) Middle to upper income | THANK/TERMINATE |

10. Would you please tell me what racial or ethnic background you consider yourself to be from? Is it: (READ LIST)

(1) African-American/Black
(2) Asian/Pacific Islander
(3) Caucasian
(4) Hispanic/Latino
(5) Native-American

11. Finally, I'd like to ask you just a couple of questions about your political affiliations.

a) Even if you aren't a registered voter, could you please tell me what political party best represents your political opinions – Is it Democrat, Republican, or Independent?

| | |
|---|---|
| Democrat | _____ |
| Republican | _____ |
| Independent | _____ |
| Other | _____ |
| Refused | _____ |

b) And on the majority of social issues facing this country today, how would you characterize your leanings – Would you say you are: mostly liberal,

somewhat liberal, neither liberal/nor conservative, somewhat conservative, or mostly conservative?

| | |
|---|---|
| Mostly liberal | _____ |
| Somewhat liberal | _____ |
| Neither liberal/ conservative | _____ |
| Somewhat conservative | _____ |
| Mostly conservative | _____ |

(GO TO SECTION C: QUALIFIED, SIGN-UP)

## Section C: QUALIFIED, SIGN-UP

Thank you. You qualify for the discussion session. If you are still interested in participating, I just need to take down some information from you to send a confirmation letter and a map of how to get to the focus group facility.

(ALL RESPONDENTS) Who should I send this out to?

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

If anything at all comes up, and you have to cancel, please give us a call at _____. Because it is such a small group, it is important that at least a certain number show up. So if you call us to cancel we can try to find a replacement for you. You can call anytime, and if we are not here, just leave a message. Thank you.

**Endnotes**

1 For screening purposes, parents and legal guardians are synonymous.

2 "Teen-involved adults" include teachers, coaches, clergy, youth recreation specialists, community outreach workers, volunteers, etc.

## Appendix 3: Focus Group Discussion Outline

## Prepared By: Communication Sciences Group

**I. Introductions, Explanation, Ground Rules (5 minutes)**

A. Explain purpose of project. *Some people who work for an organization in Washington, DC, are very concerned about teen pregnancy in [city] and the rest of the country, and they are interested in hearing from people like you about your thoughts and opinions concerning teenage pregnancy.*

B. Explain focus groups. *A research method for collecting data similar to surveys, except that rather than asking and answering questions on a one-on-one basis, I pose questions to the whole group and ask you all to respond and talk to each other.*

C. Explain ground rules.
- *Audio-taping: review and summarize your thoughts in a report*
- *Speak loudly, clearly, and one at a time*
- *Agree/Disagree: speak up*
- *I control pace of discussion: move from topics, and allow all an opportunity to speak*
- *One-way mirror*

D. Respondent introductions

**II. Group Formation Phase (10 minutes)**

A. We all know that being a parent these days can be very difficult and challenging, but I would like you to tell the group the things that you find **rewarding** about being a parent of teenagers AND/OR What do you find rewarding about working with teenagers?

**III. Attitudes and Beliefs (20 minutes)**

A. Perceptions of issues that worry them

1. What is the #1 issue that you worry about for teenagers ? (LISTEN FOR: Drugs, Family problems, Poverty and associated problems, Violence. PROBE FOR: Sexual pressures and associated problems, i.e., unintended pregnancy, STDs, AIDS)

2. Is teen pregnancy something you worry about? How much of a "problem" is teen pregnancy?

3. How concerned are you about teen pregnancy relative to other issues? How do you think pregnancy is related to these other issues? How is it different from the other issues?

B. Perceptions of pregnancy prevention ("Community Susceptibility")

1. Do you think teen pregnancy, as a "problem," is something that can be **prevented** in your community? Or do you think it's just part of today's society? Is it inevitable and just something that people should try to accept?

2. If teen pregnancy is something you believe can be prevented: What do you think can be done about it? How would you go about trying to stop it. (LISTEN FOR: role of **parents**, role of **communities** and especially **adults** who work/volunteer with teenagers, role of schools, role of teens themselves)

3. Whose responsibility do you think it is to prevent teen pregnancy? (LISTEN FOR: teenagers themselves (and different responses by gender), parents, schools, etc. PROBE FOR: community involvement, partnerships, collaboration, etc.)

4. (ASK PARTICIPANTS FOR SHOW OF HANDS: Are you the parent of a teenage boy or teenage girl?) If you think responsibility lies with teenagers, do you think it's different for boys than for girls? If yes, how so?

5. Do you think the persons you believe are responsible for preventing teen pregnancy are doing it now? Why or why not? If they are not, what are the most important consequences of their failure to not prevent (or reduce) teen pregnancy?

6. What kinds of things would **you** do to prevent or reduce teen pregnancy?

C. Identification of Barriers and Potential Benefits

1. What kinds of things prevent those persons responsible for preventing teen pregnancy from being successful? What kinds of things get in the way? (PROBE FOR: normative pressure, lack of time, lack of skills, cultural barriers, lack of values systems, other determinants, etc.)

2. What kinds of help or support do you feel people need in order to successfully prevent (or reduce) teen pregnancy? What would help them to be able to do that? (PROBE FOR: additional resources, normative support, skills-building, other determinants, etc.)

## IV. Presentation of Messages (45 minutes)

I am going to show you several different messages about teenage pregnancy that I want you to think about. I want you to take a moment and look at each one, thinking about a few things (WRITE ON FLIP CHART)– whether or not you **believe** it, how it makes you **feel**, and whether or not it would motivate you to do something. If the message makes you want **to do** something to stop teen pregnancy, I want to know what the specific action is; it can be anything, as long as it involves you **doing** something. Also, think a little bit about what the specific thing in the statement is that motivates you.

PROBE EACH CONCEPT FOR:

- ***Credibility.*** Do you believe this statement? Why or why not? What would I have to "offer" you in order to believe the statement? Is it something you already know? What additional information would you need to believe this?

- ***Comprehension.*** What does this statement say to you? What do think is the main idea or main point? Is there anything about it that is confusing?

- ***Affect.*** What feelings do you have in reaction to it? Positive? Negative? Is it intriguing? Attention-grabbing? Does it motivate you to want to do something – find out more about what it means, act in some way? (PROBE FOR: Reaction to possible message "tones," i.e. emotional appeal, authoritative, scare tactic, etc.)

- ***Cultural sensitivity.*** Do you think this statement would be accepted by most of your friends? Most of the people in your community? How about the people in your church (if you attend)? (PROBE: religious values, cultural values) Is there anything insensitive or offensive about this statement?

- ***Credible Messengers.*** Do you think it makes a difference who's saying this statement? Is there a particular organization in your community that you would trust if a spokesperson from that organization were to deliver this message? If so, which ones? How about an individual? (PROBE FOR: celebrity endorsers, e.g., president, administration official, sports figures, etc.)

## V. Key Motivational Concepts (5 minutes)

ADMINISTER ONLY AS NECESSARY.

Next we are going to talk about **three ideas** that some people seem to talk about when discussing teen pregnancy and pregnancy prevention. I'd like to know what you think of these and if you see any relationship between these statements and the messages.

PASS OUT HARD COPIES OF STATEMENTS ONE AT A TIME

1. The Problem of Teenage Pregnancy is Worse Than You Think
2. Teen Pregnancy is Not OK
3. Teen Pregnancy is Not Inevitable if We Get Involved

**VI. Acknowledgments and Conclusions (5 minutes)**

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